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THE HAUNTED MERE IN *BEOWULF*

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THE HAUNTED MERE IN *BEOWULF*

I

Romance, so modern criticism proclaims, is in no wise incompatible with the temper of the heroic epic. As in tragedy moments of poignant emotion are at once heightened and relieved by the introduction of comedy, so in epic a classic clearness of outline and tranquillity of mood are rendered doubly effective when contrasted with the mystery and magic of romance. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the second adventure of the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, in which the hero does battle with a supernatural monster far away from the haunts of men. The scene shifts suddenly from the realistic setting at the Danish court, and the very air grows heavy with baleful suggestion,—just as when the lights and feasting of the Wartburg are left behind and the mountain in which Venus holds her revels looms up at twilight. “That,” says the Anglo-Saxon poet, “is an uncanny place.” The situation grows tense with a new horror, not felt even in the earlier scene when the demon Grendel, creeping through the mists of evening, invades once too often the hall of the Danes. The element of strangeness is added to beauty, with marvellous effect.

The picture of this wild abode of demons is set before us in some twenty lines, which are hardly to be matched and certainly not to be surpassed in Anglo-Saxon for sheer poetic beauty. It would be superfluous to quote these lines, indeed, were it not that they must presently receive a more critical inspection than has sometimes been accorded to them. Their power has been universally recognized, but their significance has not, I believe, been fully understood.

- Hie dȳgel lond
 warigeað, wulf-hleoðu, windige næssas,
 frēcne fen-gelād, þær fyr-gen-strēam
- 1360 under næssa genipu niðer gewiteð,
 flōd under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon
 mīl-gemearces, þæt sē mere standeð;
 ofer þēm hongiað hrinde bearwas,
 wudu wyrtum fæst wæter overhelmað.
- 1365 þær mæg nihta gehwām nið-wundor sēon,
 fȳr on flōde. Nō þæs frōd leofað
 gumena bearna, þæt þone grund wite.
 þeah-þe hāð-stapa hundum geswenced,
 heorot hornum trum holt-wudu sēce,
- 1370 feorran geflȳmed, ær hē feorh seleð,
 aldor on ðfre, ær hē in wille,
 hafelan hȳdan. Nis þæt hēoru stōw.
 Ðonon ȳð-geblond ūp āstigeð
 won tō wolcnum, þonne wind styreð
- 1375 lāð gewidru, oð-þæt lyft drysmað,
 roderas rēotað.¹

It is extraordinary that this passage, so remarkable in itself and so important for the general interpretation of the epic, has not received more careful attention. There have been comparatively few attempts to visualize the scene and to reconcile it with other passages in the poem.² The most diverse views in regard to the location of the haunted pool have been held by critics. Only a few illustrations from the writings of prominent scholars need be cited. Brandl³ and Schück⁴ think of it as an inland lake.

¹ Ed. Heyne-Socin, revised by Schücking, ninth ed., Paderborn, 1910.

² The best are by Brooke, who does not take into account all the evidence, and Panzer, who does not consider the views of other scholars. A dissertation by E. Erlemann announces a discussion of the location of the fight with Grendel as one of the "Thesen," but this discussion is not printed. See below, p. 227.

³ *Paul's Grundriss*, second ed., p. 989: "unter einem Binnensee," etc.

⁴ *Studier i Beowulf-sagan*, Uppsala, 1909, "på bottnen af en insjö," etc. Cf. p. 18, where he seems to regard it as a marsh,— "på bottnen af ett träsk," etc.

Chadwick is doubtful; he regards it as "a pool overshadowed with trees, but apparently connected with the sea."¹ Stopford Brooke says, "It seems to be conceived by many as a deep morass in the midst of the moor, overhung with trees. But this is a careless reading of the text. It is a sea-mere, a sea-pool."² Panzer, too, believes it is salt water. "The demons dwell at the bottom of the sea (auf dem Grunde des Meeres) . . . yet evidently near the shore."³ Olrik apparently holds a similar view, "A troll, Grendel, comes at night up out of the sea (op af søen)."⁴ Clark Hall calls the haunt of the ogres "a weird lake, or more probably, an almost land-locked arm of the sea."⁵

The most far-reaching conclusions have been drawn from these different conceptions. Müllenhoff and Simrock thought Grendel and his dam were sea-monsters, and upon this basis constructed those elaborate mythological hypotheses which enjoyed so much favor in their own day, and are still held in honor.⁶ Grendel is, according to Müllenhoff, "the gigantic god or demon of the wild and gloomy sea at the time of the vernal equinox. . . . Grendel is really identical with his mother, who likewise is only a

¹ *Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol. I, p. 25.

² *History of Early English Literature*, N. Y., 1892, p. 42. The description in Brooke's shorter *English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest* is not so detailed, but is in essential agreement with the longer work.

³ *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte*, I, *Beowulf*. Munich, 1910, p. 281.

⁴ *Danmarks Heltedigtning*, Vol. I, p. 13.

⁵ *Beowulf*, London, 1911, p. 5.

⁶ As, for example, by Chantepie de la Saussaye, *Religion of the Teutons*, Boston, 1902, pp. 159-160. "That nature-myths lie concealed behind the main episodes of *Beowulf* may be regarded as certain. . . . The high floods and depths of the sea have . . . been personified in the savage water monsters of Grendel and his mother." The remarks on *Beowulf* in this generally excellent book are exceedingly infelicitous.

personification of the depths of the sea." On the other hand, the demons have been explained by Uhland and by Laistner as typifying the diseases of the pestilent marshes. These, and other analogous theories, are too well known to need further mention.¹ The only point to which I would call attention here is, that if we are going to mythologize at all in criticising *Beowulf*, as Brandl and others insist we should, it is important to know what we are mythologizing about.²

Before considering other contradictions and discrepancies in the poem, it will be well to look once more at the lines just quoted, and endeavor to arrive at a true understanding of them. We shall then be in a better position to compare this formal description of the pool with the other indications of its nature afforded by the epic. For the sake of clearness the entire passage is first translated, in a literal rather than in an imaginative way. The half-lines of the translation have been made to coincide, as far as possible, with the half-lines of the text.

- They a secret region
inhabit, wolf-cliffs, windy nesses,
dangerous pathways through the fens, where the mountain-
stream
- 1360 under the mists of the heights downwards descendeth,
flood beneath the earth. Not far is it hence
in measurement of miles that the mere standeth;
over it hang hoar-frosted (?) trees,
woods firmly rooted overshadow the water.
- 1365 There may each of nights a strange marvel be seen,

¹ For a review and bibliography of these hypotheses, as well as of those of Uhland and Laistner, see Wülker, *Grundriss der angelsächs. Litteratur*, pp. 257 ff.

² Cf. Brandl's remarks in the *Archiv*, 1909, p. 473, criticising the attack made by the present writer on the mythological theories in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 1909, Vol. XXIV, pp. 245 ff.

- fire on the flood. Not so wise is any
of the children of men as to know about those depths.
Although the heath-rover, harried by hounds,
the stag in the pride of his antlers, seek that forest-grove,
1370 driven thither from afar, sooner will he yield his life,
his breath on the bank, than plunge in,
hide his head. That is an uncanny place.
There the blending of the waters riseth up
dark to the welkin, when the wind stirreth
1375 evil weathers, until the air darkles,
the heavens weep.

Fyrgen-strēam means literally, of course, "mountain stream." But here the word seems to signify not merely a brook or torrent, but a waterfall. Although Stopford Brooke's conception of the passage as a whole seems to me incorrect, I think he was right in giving this meaning to *fyrgen-strēam*. The rest of the description confirms this rendering. There are high cliffs and mountain trees (*fyrgen-bēamas* 1414) round about this falling water (cf. *nīðer gewiteð* 1360). The *ȳð-geblond* is the "blending of the waters" of the fall and the pool beneath, which, when the wind rises, seems to ascend and darken the air (1373-1376). The natural inference that the *fyrgen-strēam* flows into the mere is confirmed by a later passage.¹

Hio (Grendel's mother) þæt lic ætbær
fēondes fæðmum under fyrgen-strēam.

The *næssa genipu* (1360), the "mists of the heights," may be the fine spray thrown out by the fall in its descent, and blown about over the windy nesses (1358). The water plunges downward, shrouded in this mist (1360). This is, indeed, so striking a suggestion of observation of a waterfall the actual descent of which can seldom be

¹ Cf. Schücking, Glossary, p. 193: *Under fyrgenstrēam* (bezeichnet die Stelle, wo der Bergstrom nach 1359 sich ins Grendelmeer ergiesst) 2128. See below, p. 237, for a discussion of the passage.

clearly seen for the spray, that the usual interpretations of mountain mists in general or "sea-mists" seem colorless in comparison.

I would also suggest a new interpretation of the phrase *flōd under foldan*. "Under the earth," says Stopford Brooke, "means that the stream had worn itself a deep channel far below the surface of the moor."¹ Gummere quotes *Kubla Khan*,

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man,
Down to a sunless sea.

Gering's conception is apparently similar,

wo des Giessbachs Strom
Unter finster umnebelten Felsen verschwindet
In der Erde Schlund.

Possibly one of these may be right, but the idea of falling water emphasized in 1360 seems to me to suggest a different picture, that of the steep rock through which the fall plunges, jutting out and beetling over it in its descent. *Under* is of course often used of an object close to a height, though not actually underneath it; as in *bāt under beorge* (211), of the galley in which Beowulf and his companions set sail for Denmark. One recalls Tennyson's lines,

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill.

And just as Beowulf's galley seemed almost to be beneath the towering walls of the fjord, so the mingling of waters in the fall and the pool seemed to be beneath the rocks above. *Folde* is a vague word, which sometimes

¹ *Loc. cit.*, p. 43. The quotations from Gummere and Gering are taken respectively from *The Oldest English Epic*, p. 83, and the German translation of *Beowulf*, Heidelberg, 1906.

signifies merely the solid elements of the universe as opposed to fluids, as for example, *ac þær lagustrēamas foldan lecaþ* (*Phoenix*, 62).

The distance of the pool from Hrothgar's court is expressly stated not to have been great (*nīs þæt feor heonan mīl-gemearces*, 1361). But this does not seem to have been very clearly visualized. The distance was apparently great enough for the warriors who returned from the first visit to the pool to indulge in several horse-races.

865 Hwīlum heaðo-rōfe hlēapan lēton,
 on geflit faran fealwe mēaras,

See also 916 ff. Yet the path was, according to 1408 ff., both narrow and steep for a part of the way. These inconsistencies are common in the epic, however. We shall have occasion presently to discuss such epic contradictions somewhat more in detail.¹

II

It now becomes necessary to look at the other passages in the poem which help to define the nature and location of the haunted mere, and to consider whether these passages may all be reconciled with one another so as to give a consistent picture.

¹ It is perhaps worth while to point out that Panzer has misunderstood the text, 840 ff., "Von Grendels Spuren heisst es 840 nur, dass sie *geond wid-wegas* verfolgt werden bis zum Meeresufer," etc., p. 282, note. The passage means, of course, that the "leaders of the people" had journeyed to Heorot to look at the marks of Grendel's visit, and that they had come from far and near over ways leading thither from a distance; it is of no significance as establishing the distance between Heorot and the pool. The rest of Panzer's note need not be quoted; it may be well, however, to observe that he attributes far more consistency to epic descriptions than careful examination confirms.

The first adventure (to l. 1251) repeatedly mentions the dwelling of Grendel and his dam as in the moors and fens, and in darkness.¹ As for the darkness, that is the natural refuge for one who is himself a devil, and who associates with devils—

755 wolde on heolster flēon,
 sēcān dēofla gedræg.

King Lear's exclamation, "Darkness and Devils!" is picturesque confirmation of this. There was not, apparently, much difference between a moor and a fen in Early English. The word *fen* seems to denote marshy or swampy land primarily, but the same meaning was in the Anglo-Saxon period attached to the word *mōr*.² At the beginning of the second adventure, also, the monsters are said to abide in moor and fen. (*pā hēo tō fenne gang*, 1295; *swylce twēgen micle mearc-stapan mōras healdan*, 1347).

No mention at all is made of the mere until 845, when we learn that the wounded Grendel

on nicera mere
fæge ond geflȳmed feorh-lāstas bær.

It is important to observe that the mere is here conceived as being *in the fen*. The poet goes on to say that Grendel

drēama lēas
in fen-freočo feorh ālegde
hæðene sǣwle, þær him hel onfēng.

Not much idea of the pool is gained from this passage,

¹ Cf. 87, 103 ff., 161 ff., 450, 710 ff., 755 ff., 762 ff., 819 ff., 844 ff.

² Cf. the N. E. D. "*Fen*: low land covered wholly or partially with shallow water, or subject to frequent inundations; a tract of such land; a marsh." "*Moor*: a tract of unenclosed waste ground"; also obs. "a marsh."

beyond the fact that the water was all dyed with the monster's blood, after he had dived into its depths.¹

The second adventure, as we have seen, gives precise details. The picturesque lines already quoted come, it will be remembered, from the lips of Hrothgar. He says (1331) that he does not know whither² the she-demon has gone, but that this latest attack is vengeance for the death of Grendel, and that he has heard his people say that they have seen two such monsters roaming over the moors,

swylce twēgen
micle mearc-stapan mōras healdan,
ellor-gāstas.

The natural inference is that the she-demon has sought her lair, which is then described (1357-76).

It soon becomes evident, on reading this and the passages that follow, that the conception of a lair in the marsh or fen is not very well sustained; at all events that there is much in the description which is inconsistent with this. There is constant mention of high and mountainous country. There are windy heights (1358). Cliffs obviously surround the pool,—the Scyldings and the Geats await the coming of Beowulf on a *næs* (1600); they find

¹Accepting the reading *dēaf* (North. *dēof*) for ms. *deog*. The exact rendering of the line is of small consequence for our general investigation.

²I cannot accept Heinzel's retention of ms. *hwæper*, "welcher von beiden," which Schücking adopts,—cf. his ed. p. 114, and glossary p. 221,—paraphrasing Heinzel (*Anz. für deutsches Alt.*, vol. xv, p. 173): "Grendels Mutter ist in finsterner Nacht gekommen, die Dänen können nicht bestimmt sagen, wer ihr Gegner gewesen. Hrōðgār drückt dies aus durch: ich weiss nicht, wer von beiden es war." But in the very next sentence Hrothgar continues, "*She* has avenged the feud," etc. Translators generally, and rightly, I think, have read *hwæder*, "whither." The ellipsis assumed by Heinzel seems to me too violent.

the head of Æschere, whom the she-demon carried off, on a *clif*, just as they reach the pool (1421); they bear Grendel's head away from the *holm-clif* (1635). To reach the spot one must climb, traversing

1410

stēap stān-hliðo, stīge nearwe,
enge ān-paðas, uncūð gelād,
nēowle næssas, nicor-hūsa fela.

There is a mountain stream, as we have seen, and there are mountain trees round about (*fyr-gen-bēamas*, 1414). At the same time, the idea of a marsh is not wholly lost sight of; the mountain stream seems to be in close juxtaposition to the "fearful pathways through the fens" (1359), and the "fire on the flood" (1366) may refer to the will o' the wisp that haunts marshy places.

Perhaps it may be possible to reconcile these features of the landscape in such a way as to accord with actual conditions of Germanic scenery. There are, of course, swampy places in mountainous country; and the presence of the waterfall and the pool beneath might give rise, even in high land, to conditions something like those in the familiar marshy land on lower levels. Such a state of things is possible. But this placing of the "fen," which suggests rather a wide area of marshy ground, in the midst of precipitous mountain scenery creates a difficulty which cannot be lightly set aside.

There is another and still more disturbing element of confusion: the presence of the nickers, monsters of the deep sea, is scarcely to be expected in an inland pool. For this, and other reasons, various scholars have concluded that the mere is really in some way connected with the sea. The grounds for this view have perhaps never been set forth so fully as by Stopford Brooke.

"It [the dwelling of the monsters] seems to be conceived by many as a deep morass in the midst of the moor, overhung by trees. But this is a careless reading of the text. It is a sea-mere, a sea-pool. *Æschere's* head is found on its edge, and its edge is the sea-cliff (*holm-clif*). In its waters are sea-dragons that seek the sea; the nickers lie there on the sloping rocks of the ness, monsters that at mid-day go out upon the open sea, and voyage on the sail-road. The one of these who is killed swims in the *holm* (in the sea). Beowulf, before he plunges, arms himself to mingle in the depths of the sea, to seek the welter of the sea—the *meregrundas*, the *sund-gebland*. It is the ocean surge (the *brim-wylm*) which receives him as he plunges. The beasts who attack him are sea-beasts (*sæ-dēor monig*). Grendel's mother is the sea-wolf (*brim-wylf*). It is a sea-headland where Beowulf's thegns sit and watch for his return; the booty he brings back, the sword-hilt and Grendel's head, is sea-booty (*sæ-lāc*). When they all return, they return from the sea-cliff (*holm-clif*). There is not a trace in all this of a deep pool in the moor, of a morass. We are on the sea-nesses, looking down into a sea-hole, and it is not difficult, from the indications given, to sketch the place with some accuracy. Indeed, so clearly is it drawn that I believe the describer had seen the very spot." (p. 42.)

Some of this argument is not very convincing. The words *sæ*, *holm*, *mere*, *sund*, *brim*, may be used of inland water, though it is somewhat difficult to adduce examples of this, since descriptions of small bodies of inland water are rare in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Bosworth-Toller cites two instances for *sæ*, and several for *mere*. We may note that the stream which gushed out of the rock at the command of St. Andrew is called *mereflōd* (1526), *sund* (1528), *geofen* (1531), *firgendstrēam* (1573), and *brim* (1574).¹ The fact that certain phrases were used in the majority of cases to apply to the deep sea does not absolutely limit their use.² Anglo-Saxon poetry was not particular about the propriety of its synonyms, any more

¹The citations are from Krapp's edition of the *Andreas*, Albion Series, Boston, 1906.

²The same principle applies to *næs*, a cliff running out into the water.

than were the ballads; which could call the babe on the mother's knee an "auld son," or mention a "true-love" who was false. Verse in which description is highly formal and conventional disregards the nice appropriateness of the epithet. Anglo-Saxon poetic technic laid great stress on the accumulation of synonyms; and the language was not rich enough to provide separate categories for all occasions. Hence poetic elaborations were often used with considerable looseness.

But it is not so easy to dispose of the nickers. It might perhaps be urged that the sea-beasts in this particular spot were only said to be *of the same sort*¹ that travel on the "sail-road," or sea, and that these may be fresh-water cousins of the deep-sea variety. This hardly settles the matter satisfactorily, however. The nickers are beasts of size and ferocity, to judge from Beowulf's encounters with them during his swimming-feat with Breca, and in the mere itself. They seem ill-suited to the quiet inland pool of marshy character, with its overhanging trees and its mountain stream. Their presence in great numbers (*wyrmcynnnes fela, sellice sǣ-dracon*) is disturbing to the picture created by the lines preceding, 1357-1376. On the two other occasions when Beowulf has had to deal with them, the nickers have been creatures of the deep sea (421, 574). There is undoubtedly a very salty smell about these monsters. They really seem to have little business in an inland pool.

We have, then, in various places in the poem, indications of three separate conceptions of the location of the mere: first, in the moors and fens; second, in high and rocky land; and third, in or near the sea. The reader may form his own opinion, from the preceding discussion,

¹ Cf. 1428.

as to whether the discrepancies which have been indicated can be reconciled so as to show that the poet was clearly visualizing nature. The present writer has tried in vain to do this. The results of such an explanation may be studied in Mr. Brooke's pages.

"What we see then is this. At a certain point in the cliff face, between two jutting nesses, there is a deep sea-gorge, with a narrow entrance from the sea. The waves are driven into it, boil and welter in the confined space, and are whirled on high. At the landward base of the cliffs, the rocks slope downwards, and on these rocks, as we see afterwards, the nickers (pictured from the great seals and walruses) are lying, whose habit it is—and the phrase points to an observation of real animals intruded into the tale—to sleep in the morning stretched out on the ness-slopes, and at mid-day to get ready 'for a sorrow-bringing expedition into the open sea, into the sail-road.' At the land end of the sea-gorge the cliff rises and forms the neck between the two lateral nesses, and the moor, coming down to the neck, has been worn away into a deep channel by the working of a mountain stream. All along this hollow channel the descending stream has made trees grow, but when the torrent comes to the edge of the cliff—'a ledge of gray stone,'—it leaps over in a waterfall into the weltering waves below. Over this waterfall the trees, fast-rooted, hang down and darken the pool underneath. They rustle in the wind that comes up from below, and the vapors from the spray of the waterfall and the sea-tumble underneath mingle with the inland mists driven seaward from the moor. I have seen such places on the coasts of Cornwall and the north-west of Ireland. I have no doubt that there are many such among the fiords of Norway and Sweden." (p. 43.)

Such is the strange composite picture which we get when we try to unite all the elements in the description of the pool. It is dangerous to try to reconcile scattered statements in the poem; Professor W. M. Hart, for example, has noted that various indications here and there in the course of the narrative "certainly do not give the same impression as Stopford Brooke's collective description."¹

¹ *Harvard Studies and Notes*, Vol. XI, p. 222. Professor Hart refers especially to pp. 31 ff. of Brooke's discussion. The inconsistencies

Clark Hall, in the Introduction to his translation of *Beowulf*, says that "in fact, the shores of the Roskilde and Isse-fjords are as unlike the scene of the Second Adventure, as reconstructed by Stopford Brooke, as it is possible for them to be."¹ But this is no particular objection to Brooke's reconstruction, except in so far as he attempts to defend his theory by an appeal to geographical conditions. There is no reason why the scenery of the epic should be like that actually existing on the coast of Zealand. The question for us to decide is whether this extraordinary combination of inland and seashore, of marsh and mountain, of fresh water and salt water was due to a single poet, recalling something which he had actually seen, or whether we have here to do with one of those contaminations of different conceptions of the same event or scene which are elsewhere to be found in *Beowulf*, as well as in other epic poetry based on popular material. According to Brooke's own theory of the evolution of the poem (cf. pp. 15 ff.), this description must have originated in Denmark, have been transmitted, in lay form, to the British Isles, and there faithfully preserved, in all its complexity, not only by all those who perpetuated this lay, but also by the poet who finally made an epic out of the scattered lays. This is obviously highly improbable. If we are to defend this description of the pool as actual

in the description of the haunts of the demons have already been noted by critics. Cf. Panzer, *loc. cit.*, p. 282: "Es überrascht zunächst nach dieser Beschreibung das Gedicht an zahlreichen anderen Stellen versichern zu hören, dass die beiden Dämonen die 'Mark,' das 'Moor,' den Sumpf, bewohnten. . . . Es erklärt sich das offenbar daraus, dass die unbebaute Mark vor dem Meere, der Wald- und Sumpfgürtel, der zwischen der See und dem Königshofe liegt, noch zum Bereiche der Dämonen gerechnet werden."—Panzer fails to note that the pool itself is actually put in the fen; cf. l. 851 and the preceding discussion, p. 215.

¹ Edition of 1901, p. xxiii.

observation of nature, we had better attribute it to the final poet himself, as a reminiscence of his observation of English scenery. The Germanic peoples were fond of borrowing stories from abroad, and recasting them to suit themselves, and, of course, they never bothered about accuracy of scenic setting, any more than they did about consistency of chronology or of genealogy. When the Scandinavians took over the story of the Niblungs, they made Brynhild, after her betrothal to Gunnar, walk out on the glaciers in her angry broodings.¹ They did not stop to inquire whether the place where the historical Gundicarius held his court was provided with glaciers. When they sent his kinsmen on a journey to the court of Attila, they were so little sure of their geography that they now conceived the journey as made by water, and now by land.² It would of course be easy to multiply instances of this sort, were others necessary. But it needs little acquaintance with Germanic poetry to prove that the scenery of any story was imagined to be of the sort with which the tellers of the story were themselves familiar.

The present writer feels that the most reasonable explanation of the discrepancies in the description of the haunted pool is that the epic, in its present form, preserves traces of different conceptions, which came into existence at different stages in the development of the story. We must undoubtedly imagine the lay or lays on the general subject of the fight with Grendel and his dam as circulating orally in versions varying somewhat one from another. The original idea of the lair of these demons, whatever this may have been in the tale as brought to Britain, may well have been altered in time, so that the

¹ *Sigurðarkviða en skamma*, st. 8.

² Contrast the *Atlamól* with the *Atlakviða*.

same general story might circulate in regions not very far apart, with different stage-settings. Then, when these lays were finally utilized by a single poet for a continuous epic, traces of these different conceptions might appear in his work. It is possible, of course, that even before the final recasting into approximately the present form, there might be interinfluence between the separate lays.¹

This view of the situation is borne out by abundant and unimpeachable testimony. Consider, for example, the fusion of the ballads into the *Gest of Robin Hood*, which may throw light on the evolution of an epic out of the lays which underlie *Beowulf*. "We seem to have pretty good reason to believe," says Professor Hart, "that some one (or ones) made a careful and conscientious effort to work over into a consistent whole the diverse materials that went to make the *Gest*."² Yet, in utilizing ballads from different cycles for his little epic, the poet admitted glaring geographical inconsistencies, as a result of thus combining originally separate material. Professor F. J. Child³ has discussed this fully, noting that "the compiler of the *Gest* did not concern himself to adjust these matters. There was evidently at one time a Barnsdale cycle and a Sherwood cycle of Robin Hood ballads. . . . If (the Sheriff of Nottingham) was adopted from the Sherwood into the Barnsdale set, this was done without a rearrangement of the topography." Child thought it likely that "the knight's castle, in the original ballad, was

¹ It is hardly necessary to say that the present argument is not based on acceptance of the theory that the *Beowulf*-poet was merely stringing together or dovetailing epic lays. I agree with those critics who regard the present poem as free composition on the basis of oral epic material.

² *Loc. cit.*, p. 96.

³ *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. III, pp. 50, 51. See also Hart, *loc. cit.*, p. 89.

in Lancashire. However this may be, it is put in the *Gest*, 309 ff., on the way between Nottingham and Robin Hood's retreat, which must be assumed to be Barnsdale." Many other instances of the blending of different conceptions in epic will occur to the reader: the different locations of Charlemagne's capital in the *Chanson de Roland*, the two meetings of Sigurd and Brynhild in the *Volsungasaga*, the many discrepancies in the *Poetic Edda*, the heroic lays of which, though far from constituting an epic, have been arranged and provided with prose transitions by a compiler, so as to make a connected story. These redactors apparently hesitated to sacrifice any version of the story; they preferred to perpetuate, in the same narrative, mutually contradictory accounts. Observe, for example, the method of the poet of the *Gripisspó*,¹ and the conscientiousness of the man who wrote the prose epilog to the *Fragmentary Lay of Sigurd*.² There is an admirable illustration of the fusion of two different motives in the dragon adventure in *Beowulf*—the hero's desire for glory and treasure, and his desire to protect his people.³ Schück finds in the *Æschere*-episode of *Beowulf* reminiscences of an earlier form, illustrated by the Asbjörn-episode in the story of Orm Storolfsson.⁴ But examples of this sort need not be multiplied; the point is too obvious

¹ "Zwei verschiedene Sagen, die in älterer Zeit verschiedene Dichter an ein und dieselbe Person geknüpft haben, vereint er (the poet) und bringt nun die Ereignisse in zeitliches Verhältnis zu einander." Mogk, *Paul's Grundriss*, Vol. II, p. 627.

² "This lay tells about the death of Sigurd, and it appears here, that they slew him out of doors. But others say that he was killed indoors in his bed, while he slept," etc.

³ Cf. Panzer, *loc. cit.*, p. 309: "Die Erzählung von Beowulfs Drachenkampf ist stoffgeschichtlich kein einfacher Typus, zeigt sich vielmehr zusammengeschweisst aus dem Thor- und dem Fafnir-typus," etc. Cf. also the present writer's *Medieval Story*, N. Y., 1911, pp. 43 ff.

⁴ *Studier i Beowulfagan*, p. 22.

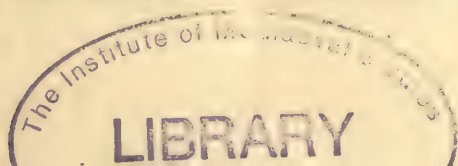
to need illustration. We ought to be constantly on our guard, however, against treating *Beowulf* as though it were the work of a modern poet, solicitous to avoid contradictions and anxious for perfect consistency in the motivation of events. We have long since learned not to apply twentieth-century standards of exactness to the criticism of medieval literature. Even in modern times we are not free from inconsistencies like those which we think strange in early poetry; the greatest writers—Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller,—are open to the same reproach as the *Beowulf*-poet, if reproach there must be.¹

Thus far, then, we have reached the following conclusions: that the descriptions of the haunted mere reveal three conceptions of its nature and location: (1) in the moor or fen, (2) in high and rocky land, (3) in or near the sea; that it is impossible to reconcile all these so as to give a single consistent picture of natural scenery; and that in view of mutually contradictory elements appearing elsewhere in *Beowulf*, and in other epics, it is most reasonable to assume that different conceptions were here amalgamated, despite their unlikeness, in the usual course of epic evolution.

III

We now come to a further stage in our investigation; we must inquire whether it is possible to determine which of these conceptions represents the original form of the story, as attached to the figure of Beowulf, and brought to England. Careful examination will enable us, I think, to answer that it is possible, and to produce evidence of

¹ Jellinek and Kraus, *Zts. für d. österr. Gym.*, 1893, pp. 673 ff. Cf. also on this general subject, Gummere's *Oldest English Epic*, pp. 6 ff.



though entered by a mountain-portal; sometimes as on the mountain itself. In some versions of the story, water must be traversed ere an entrance can be effected. For a detailed examination of the evidence upon these points, the reader is referred to Panzer's tabulations.¹ We must take the evidence of these *märchen* with caution, yet their importance is obvious; they give an idea of the typical story before the addition to it of historical material. When we find the abode of the demons is so often in mountainous country in the *märchen*, it is reasonable to

¹ Panzer, p. 116: "In den meisten Varianten liegt das Reich des Dämons unter der Erde. Man erblickt zunächst nur den Zugang, der in verschiedener Weise definiert wird. Die Öffnung, in der der Dämon verschwunden ist, heisst ein Brunnen (in 46 *märchen*), ein tiefes Loch (40 *märchen*), Loch im Fluss, Loch in einem Berg (5), auf dem Gipfel eines Berges (3), Gang wie ein Schornstein in einem Kjæmpehöj (der nachher Berg heisst), Schacht (2), Schacht auf dem Gipfel eines Hügels, der in einem Sumpfe liegt, Erdschlund, Abgrund (3), Höhle (14), Höhle wie ein Brunnen, Erdhöhle, Höhle auf einem hohen Berg, in einem Berg, in Berg Bolchon, Felsenhöhle, Felsenspalte, tiefe Öffnung vor einem Felsen, Grube (8), das Meer, hohler Baum, eine hohle Eiche, unter der eine Öffnung liegt, als man sie ummacht, Gewölbe, Keller, seperdura. Mehrfach verwehrt den Zugang zu dieser Öffnung ein Hindernis, das nur der Held zu beseitigen vermag. . . . Durch diese Öffnung nun lässt der Held sich kühn hinab in die unbekannte Tiefe. Als Beförderungsmittel dient gewöhnlich ein Seil; doch fehlt es daneben nicht an allerlei phantastischen Bestimmungen. . . . Mehrfach lässt sich ohne weiteres sogleich der Held selbst in die Tiefe. . . ."—P. 120: "Bei allen bisher betrachteten Fassungen handelt es sich um eine Fahrt in die Tiefe. Wir haben nun schon oben S. 116 aus einer Reihe von Varianten die Angabe kennen gelernt, der Eingang zu dem unterirdischen Reiche habe auf der Spitze eines Hügels, Berges, hohen Berges gelegen. Nach mehreren Varianten liegt aber jene transszendente Welt, das Reich des Dämons, der die Prinzessinnen bewahrt, selbst auf dem Berge; unzugänglich wird es bei dieser Formulierung dadurch, dass Steile und Höhe des Berges es schützen." It is evident, then, that whether or not the demon abode was conceived as far underground, the entrance was in very many *märchen* placed in mountainous country.

suppose that this may have been the case in the particular form of the tale which was brought into connection with Beowulf, and with historical Scandinavian personages. Still more striking evidence pointing to the same conclusion will be brought forward presently.

Meanwhile we may digress for a moment to inquire why the fen and moor appear to have partly supplanted the older conception of rocky mountain scenery as a background for this adventure. Here we can do little more than conjecture. Any place so gloomy and desolate as the moor was of course a proper abode for unclean spirits. But it seems likely that the frequent emphasis upon Grendel's descent from Cain may have led to referring his dwelling to the moors.¹ This conception is inextricably woven into the first adventure, and it is again referred to at the beginning of the second:—

Grendel's mother, the woman, horrid she-devil, remembered her misery, she whose fate it was to dwell in the frightful waters, the cold streams, after Cain had murdered his own brother, the child of his own father; he then fled away, proscribed, marked with murder, fled the joys of men, dwelt in the desert. From him sprang many demons of fate; one of them was Grendel. (1258 ff.).

The nearest approach to the "desert and waste places" (cf. *wēsten warode*), where the descendants of Cain might be supposed to dwell, the Land of Nod, or of wandering, which produced for Cain none of the good fruits of the earth, were these lonely and barren moors so familiar to our Germanic ancestors.² As soon as Grendel was con-

¹ O. Lüning, *Die Natur in der altgermanischen und mittelhochdeutschen Epik*, etc., Zürich, 1889, gives illustrations of this, but all his really significant citations of haunted moors are drawn from *Beowulf*.

² For a full discussion of the legends of Cain, especially in reference to *Beowulf*, see O. F. Emerson, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. XXI, esp. pp. 860 ff.; 878 ff.

nected with the tribe of Cain, such a change as this in the localization of his dwelling might easily have taken place. And it may have been strengthened by the purely heathen conception that the moor was the natural refuge of evil spirits. In any case, as Emerson has shown, and indeed as everyone realizes nowadays, the Christian elements are far more ingrained in the story than appears on the surface. It is altogether possible that the tale was affected by Christian conceptions while still in circulation in the form of lays. Heathen and Christian ideas are curiously blended in the poem; the conflicting references to Wyrð and to the Christian God as directing the affairs of the universe are perhaps a part of the same tendency that puts the demons now in the moor and now on the heights. But we may be sure, of course, that the Christian coloring is relatively late, and that any stage-setting which is due to this is also late and secondary.

It is of course unwise to treat the development of these different conceptions in too simple and mechanical a fashion. The marshy ground naturally caused by the waterfall on the heights might have been extended in the retellings of the story, confused with the larger tracts of swampy land like the fens, and then ultimately identified with these. For the sake of clearness the attempt has been made to define the principal issues sharply, but in tracing the evolution of this ever-shifting popular material we must be on our guard against too much preciseness. The main point to be borne in mind is that the mountain and waterfall scenery is the fundamental conception with which the others appear to have been later confused.

Here and there a statement needs revision, as for example that the second adventure "is a late and less artistic imitation of the Grendel-Beowulf story" (p. 882). Cf. Brandl, *loc. cit.*, p. 995.

IV

That the location of the haunted mere inland among high rocks, and with a waterfall, is original rather than secondary is still more convincingly shown by a comparison of the second adventure in *Beowulf* with the saga of Grettir Asmundarson. As is well known, the correspondences between this saga and the earlier part of the Anglo-Saxon epic are very numerous and striking. No other analog presents so many points of resemblance to *Beowulf*. These are particularly noteworthy in connection with the adventure with Grendel's mother: in both stories the hero pursues a female monster to her lair under the waters, dives to the bottom, reaches a cave in which a fire is burning, in which he later finds treasure, and finally kills a demon, whose blood, appearing in the waters, gives the impression above that the hero has been vanquished, so that he is given up for dead. The monster in the saga fights with a weapon called *hepti-sax*, while Beowulf goes into the water armed with a *hæft-mece*. There is much, of course, that is unlike the narrative in *Beowulf*, but this is to be expected in a story worked over into its present form some six centuries later, and attached to an entirely different hero. The surprising thing is rather that the points of divergence are so few. Every scholar admits that, with all possible reservations, the resemblances are too close and too numerous to be accidental.¹

¹ For the relations between *Beowulf* and the *Grettissaga*, cf. Vigfússon, *Prolegomena to the Sturlungasaga*, I, p. xlv; *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, Vol. II, pp. 501-503; Gering, *Anglia*, Vol. III, pp. 74-87; Bugge, *Paul-Braune Beiträge*, Vol. XII, pp. 57 ff.; Panzer, *loc. cit.*, pp. 313 ff.; Schück, *loc. cit.*, pp. 15 ff. The theories of R. C. Boer in his edition of the *Grettissaga* (see below, p. 242) and in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, Vol. XXX, pp. 1 ff., are better avoided. See note below, p. 242.

But there are still other striking parallels which even the latest critics have not noted. The *Grettissaga* appears to preserve, despite later accretions and alterations, the original conception of the dwelling of the demons in the story of Beowulf as it was brought to England. The preceding investigation has brought us to a point where this will appear very clearly. The exact relationship between *Beowulf* and the *Grettissaga* is still a matter of dispute among scholars; and upon this question the parallels to which attention is here called will throw a good deal of light.

In order to estimate these resemblances at their proper value we must first look with some care at the narrative in the *Grettissaga*. The extract which is here translated is by no means the least interesting part of the story. In its present form, the saga cannot be earlier than the end of the thirteenth century. Finnur Jónsson places it at 1300,¹ or after. It is, nevertheless, admirably told in many ways. Mogk records his judgment that "this saga belongs in view of its composition, language, and excellent delineation of character, to the best of those of the later time." At the point where we take up the story, Grettir, under the name of Guest, has come to stay at a house in Sandhaugar, south of the Eyjardalsá. It is about Yule-tide. He has heard that the house is haunted; twice in the absence of the good-wife at Christmas-time a man has mysteriously disappeared. Bloody marks on the outer doors have led folk to believe that supernatural creatures have visited the place. Grettir has something of a reputation as a troll-queller, and while the wife is absent at church, he abides the coming of the monster.²

¹ *Den oldnorske og oldislanzke Litteraturs Histoire*, Vol. II, p. 751.

² The following translation is based on the edition by R. C. Boer, *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek*, Vol. VIII, Halle, 1900. There is a

Now is it to be told of Grettir, that as midnight approached, he heard outside a great noise. Then there came into the room a huge troll-wife. She carried in one hand a chopping-tray, and in the other a great knife. She looked about as soon as she came in, and saw where Guest lay, and leaped at him, but he rushed at her, and they clinched desperately, and wrestled a long time in the room. She was the stronger, but he knew how to seize his opportunity cleverly. Everything about them was broken in pieces, even the wall-covering around the room. She drew him out to the inner door, and then to the outer door, and here he resisted her desperately. She wanted to drag him out of the house, but could not do it until they had wrenched off all the woodwork about the doors, and carried it out on their shoulders. She dragged him down to the river, to the steep rocky cliff (*at gljúfrum*). Guest was exceedingly tired, but one of two alternatives lay before him: either to defend himself, or let her drag him over the cliff. They struggled all night long. He thought he had never struggled with so powerful a troll before. She held him clutched so close that he could not grasp anything, except that he held her fast about the body. But when they came to the precipice above the river (*árgljúfrit*), he succeeded in shaking the troll-wife loose and getting the use of his right hand. He quickly reached for the sword at his belt and drew it; he cut at the shoulder of the troll so that her right arm was severed, and so he was freed. But she plunged over the cliff and so into the waterfall. (*En hon steypitz i gljúfrin ok svá i forsinn*). Guest was both stiff and weary, and lay there long on the rocky river cliffs. When day broke, he went home, and so to bed.

When the housewife came back from church, it seemed to her that her house was in great disorder. She went to Guest and asked what had happened, since everything was broken and trampled down. He told all that had occurred. This seemed to her a marvel, and she asked who he was. He told her his real name, and asked her to fetch the priest, saying that he wished to speak to him. This was done, and when Steinn the priest came to Sandhaugar he found that Grettir Asmundarson had come thither under the name of Guest. The priest asked him what he supposed had become of the men who had disappeared. Grettir said he thought they had disappeared over the precipice (*i gljúfrin*.) The priest said that he could not believe what he told him, if he could not get ocular proof of it. Grettir

German translation by Gering, *Anglia*, Vol. III, pp. 79 ff.; see also for the same, Förster, *Beowulf-Materialien*, Braunschweig, 1908, pp. 14 ff. The extract here translated, § LXV f. of the saga, will be found on pp. 235 ff. of Boer's edition.

replied that they would find out all about it later. The priest went home. Grettir lay a long time in bed. The good-wife took good care of him, and so the Yule-tide passed. According to Grettir's story the troll-woman fell over the precipice when she was wounded; but the men of Barthadal say that the light of day shone upon her while they were wrestling, and that when Grettir cut off her hand she died, and that she stands there (turned to stone) in the shape of a woman.¹ The dalesmen kept Grettir concealed.

The same winter after Yule-tide, Grettir went one day to Eyjardalsá, and when he and the priest met, Grettir said, "I see, priest," he says, "that you put little confidence in what I say! Now I want you to come with me to the river and see for yourself what the state of the case really seems to be." The priest did so. And when they came to the waterfall, they saw a cave beneath the overhanging rock; the precipice was so high that no one could climb up, and it was nearly ten fathoms from above to the water.² They had brought along a rope. Then the priest said, "It seems to me quite impossible to get down there." "It is possible," said Grettir, "but it will be best for the man who undertakes it to have plenty of courage. I am going to see what is in the waterfall, and you must look after the rope." The priest said Grettir should have his way. He drove a stake into the rock (to hold the rope), and heaped stones upon it.

Now it is to be told of Grettir that he fastened a stone into a noose in the rope, and let it sink down into the water. "How do you intend to do this?" asked the priest. "I don't want to be impeded when I reach the waterfall," said Grettir, "that seems to me wisest."

¹ A common superstition, that beings of the other world are turned to stone when the rays of the sun strike them, is here confused with the original story. Many of the latter alterations in the tale are clearly visible, as for instance, the motivation of Grettir's descent into the waterfall in order to convince the priest of his assertions.

² The exact meaning of this passage is not clear. The original is as follows: *En er þeir kómu til forsins, sá þeir skúta upp undir bergit; þat var meitilberg svá mikit, at hvergi mátti upp komaz, ok nær tíu faðma ofan at vatninu.* Panzer takes the ten fathoms as the distance from the top of the cliff to the cave below the fall; Boer the ten fathoms as the distance from the cave to the surface of the pool. (P. 238, note). *Þat var meitilberg . . . komaz* seems to mean that no one could get out of the cave up the precipice to the top. It seems to me most natural to take the ten fathoms as the distance from the top of the cliff to the pool beneath. The exact meaning is not important for our purposes.

Thereupon he prepared to descend; he had little clothing on, but he had girded himself with his sword and he had no more weapons. Then he leaped down from the summit of the cliff into the waterfall. The priest saw the soles of his feet (disappear) but never knew beyond that what had become of him. Grettir dived under the waterfall, and that was difficult, because the force of the water was great and he had to dive to the very bottom before he could get up under the fall. (*Grettir kafaði undir forsinn, ok var þat torvelt, þvíat iða var mikil, ok varð hann allt til grunns at kafa, áðr en hann kæmiz upp undir forsinn.*) There was a little projection, and he climbed up on that. There was a great cave under the waterfall, and the water poured down in front of it from the top of the cliff. He went into the cave, where was a great fire burning. Grettir saw there a frightful great giant; he was horrible to look upon. And when Grettir advanced towards him, the giant leaped up and grasped a pike and aimed a blow at the stranger; with this weapon one could either cut or thrust. It had a wooden shaft; a weapon made in this way was at that time called a *heptisax*. But Grettir parried with his sword and hewed the shaft of the spear in two. Then the giant tried to get hold of a sword which hung behind him in the cave, but Grettir struck him full in the breast so that his chest and stomach were cloven, and his entrails fell down into the water, and were borne down in the course of the stream. And the priest, as he was sitting by the rope, saw some gouts of blood floating down past the rope. Then he got uneasy, and felt sure that Grettir had been killed. He thereupon left his watching of the rope, and went back home. Evening had now come on, and the priest said that of a surety Grettir was dead, and that it was great pity of such a man.

Now it is to be told of Grettir that he gave one blow after another until the giant lay dead. Then he went further into the cave, got a light and explored the place. No one knows how much gold he got in the cave, yet men say that there was quite a quantity of it (*at verit hafi nokkut*). He remained there into the night. He found the bones of two men, which he put into a bag. Then he went out of the cave and swam to the rope, and shook it, supposing the priest was still there. But when he realized that the priest had gone home he had to climb up the rope by main force, and so he got up again on the rocky height.

It will be observed, in the first place, that the general location of Grettir's contest under the water is much like what we may believe to be the original scenery of Beowulf's second adventure. There are in the Scandinavian

tale the same high cliffs, from which one looks down to the waters below, and the same waterfall breaking down over the rocks, and plunging into a turbulent whirlpool. These general and essential features of inland mountain scenery are the same. Certain details naturally vary; there is less suggestion of a river in the Anglo-Saxon, although a waterfall such as is there described could hardly exist without something like a river as tributary to it. But exact correspondence is not to be expected; and the lack of it vitiates the validity of the parallel no more than the fact that Grettir fights the she-demon on land and the he-demon under the water, instead of the reverse, as in *Beowulf*.

The resemblances extend, however, much further than this. The Scandinavian account explains, I believe, the true nature of the cave or hall in which Beowulf battled with Grendel's dam. This is not, it will be observed, "at the bottom of the mere," as is often said.¹ Beowulf indeed dives to the bottom, but he does not stay at the place which he first reaches; he is carried thence to the demon cave. It took him a day to reach the bottom,²

Brim-wylm onfēng

1495 hilde-rince. þā wæs hwīl dāges
 ær hē þone grund-wong ongytan mehte.

Then the she-demon perceived that a mortal was trespassing in her realm, and went to the bottom of the mere herself, from whence she dragged him to her hall. It is possible, of course, that she was temporarily "not at

¹ Cf. Wyatt, *Beowulf*, 1898, p. xiv; Schück, *loc. cit.*, p. 18.

² A common *märchen*-exaggeration preserved in the epic, see Panzer, pp. 119, 286. As Panzer points out (note to p. 283) *hwīl dāges* may mean "ein gutes Stück Tags"; they left in early morning, and at three o'clock the blood appeared on the water. But the epic is not consistent in these details.

home," but the natural way to take the passage is that she left her lair, seized the hero, and dragged him back to it.¹

1506 Bær þā sēo brim-wlyf, þā hēo tō botme cōm,
 hringa þengel tō hofe sīnum.

The hall was not very near the place where Beowulf touched the bottom; for a great many sea-beasts (*wundra þæs fela* 1509, *sǣdēor monig* 1510) attacked him on the way thither, and he had to fight them off. When he finally arrived, he found that he was in a hall protected by the roof from the flood, and in which a fire was burning.

 þā sē eorl ongeat,
 þæt hē in nið-sele nāt-hwylcum wæs,
 þær him wæter nēnig wihte ne-sceðede,
1515 nē him for hrōf-sele hrīnan ne-mehte
 fār-gripe flōdes; fȳr-leoht geseah,
 blāene lēoman beorhte scīnan.

Could anything be clearer? The place where the demon has dragged Beowulf is the cave behind the waterfall,—*under firgen-strēam*, 2128,—where, as the poem tells us, she had previously taken the luckless Æschere. Beowulf dives to the bottom, just as Grettir did, in order to avoid the whirlpool and thus get up underneath the waterfall. This was the regular way to reach the cave. Grendel, it will be remembered, plunged into the depths,—*meregrund gefēoll*, 2100,—in order to reach his retreat. The mother is called *grundwyrge*n, 1518, because the pool and

¹ The illustration of the demon pool in Koch and Heusler, *Urväterhort*, Berlin (no date), p. 12, is excellent. It shows rocky mountain country, and a descending stream almost like a waterfall. But Heusler says in the text: "Die Grendelmutter fuhr auf ihn (Beowulf) los, umkrallte seinen Leib, den die Brünne schützte, und schleifte ihn in ihren Saal am Seegrunde."

² The reading *grund-sele* in the deficient half-line in *þam sele*, 2139, is, if the present argument be correct, to be rejected, and some other, as *gūð-sele*,—(Thorpe, Holthausen, Sedgfield, etc.) substituted.

its depths are her domain,—this involves no contradiction. Beowulf's return from the hall is too vaguely described to be of assistance in locating it, nor do other passages in the poem, so far as I can see, afford further help.

So the northern story, late as it is, provides the key which explains the situation in *Beowulf*. Schück, like so many others, placed the hall in the Anglo-Saxon epic at the bottom of the marsh, but recognized that the northern story was closer to the original form. "Such a cave at the bottom of a marsh, and free from water, makes, even in saga, the impression of not being the original form of the story, and it looks as though the northern sagas had better preserved the original motive." And he calls attention to the location of the cave in the sagas of Grettir and of Orm, but does not elaborate the point. There is nothing impossible, in such a fairy story as this, about a dry hall at the bottom of a mere; such things happen in *märchen*. But the evidence of the *Grettissaga*, which so closely resembles *Beowulf* in other ways, is of far more importance than that of the remoter *märchen*.

It is highly important to observe that the natural setting in the *Grettissaga* does not appear to be due to its localization at this place in Iceland. On the contrary, as Bugge pointed out,¹ citing Kälund, this description of the scenery corresponds little to the actual landscape south of the Eyjardalsá. "The Eyjardalsá is, in the vicinity of Sandhaugar, an unimportant stream, which runs in rather a shallow sandy bed." Various conjectures² have been made as to what caused the localization of the story at this place. Kälund, who has made the most careful study of the matter, thinks the description rests on imagi-

¹ *Paul-Braune Beiträge*, Vol. XII, p. 364. Kälund's work has not been accessible to me.

² Panzer, p. 403; Bugge, *loc. cit.*; Boer, see note above.

nation.¹ It is very significant, then, that the idea of a cave under a waterfall, in precipitous country, adhered so strongly to the story that the natural scenery was disregarded in order to retain it.

This waterfall reappears in various forms of the story of Grim Helguson, but these depend so much upon the influence of the *Grettissaga* that no safe conclusions may be drawn from them. In the story of Orm, on the other hand, the situation is quite different. Here the fight with the monsters is in the island of Dollzey or Sandey in Western Norway, where there is a cave high up in a precipitous rock above the water. According to Bugge, this cave had already been conceived as the abode of a supernatural being, and was the cause of the attraction of our story thither. The similarities between *Beowulf* and the *Ormsþátr* are very meager as compared to those between *Beowulf* and the *Grettissaga*. Bugge observed that the form of the saga in the *Ormsþátr* had departed considerably from the original version.² Speculation as to the exact connection of the *Ormsþátr* with related material is not at present in order. It is significant, however, that a cave in the side of a precipice appears to have been the cause of the localization of the story in Dollzey.

The bearing of the foregoing analysis upon the evolution of the material in *Beowulf* will be obvious. Scholars have always recognized the close connection between *Beowulf* and the *Grettissaga*, ever since resemblances between the two were first pointed out. To these resemblances

¹ "Auf freier phantasie," Boer, note to p. 238.

² Allein die auf Dollzey localisirte sage liegt in dem von einem Isländer verfassten Ormsþátr Stórolfssonar weder in ihrer ursprünglichen noch in der von der Grettissaga vorausgesetzten gestalt vor, denn die Grettissaga hat mehrere hauptzüge der saga erhalten, welche in der Ormsþátr nicht vorkommen, sich dagegen in dem Beowulfsliede wiederfinden." *Loc. cit.*, p. 365.

have now been added others, of even greater value in determining the relationships of the two stories. It is clear that the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, in anything like the form in which we have it at present, could not have given a hint for the description of Grettir's adventure at the waterfall. The situation is obscure in Anglo-Saxon; it is crystal-clear in Scandinavian. The fact that the *Grettissaga* explains so well the obscurities of the Anglo-Saxon version prevents us from concluding that the main outlines of the Scandinavian account represent a late rationalization or alteration of the original situation. An earlier form of the version in *Beowulf*, in which the localization by an inland waterfall was not obscured by other conceptions, might conceivably have been transmitted to Scandinavia, and ultimately have given rise to the version in the *Grettissaga*. But this earlier form must itself have originated in Scandinavian territory, since we can hardly suppose that the Anglo-Saxons would have imagined such a landscape as this either by recollection of their old homes on the shores of the Low Countries or by acquaintance with their new homes in England. A waterfall among high rocks, in which a supernatural being is believed to dwell, is a common and characteristic feature of Scandinavian mountain scenery, as any one who has ever been to Norway will remember. So characteristic is it, indeed, that the monument to Ole Bull in Bergen represents the master as standing on the rocks above a waterfall, while beneath the fall a *nøkken*, or water-sprite, is listening to the music of the violin. On the other hand, it is not at all characteristic of scenery in the Low Countries. Nor is it usual in English landscapes; the Anglo-Saxons would hardly have got such a scene as this from observation of conditions in Britain. The natural inference, then, is that the account in the

Grettissaga was not derived from an early form of the story of *Beowulf* due to observation of nature on the part of the Anglo-Saxons, either in Britain or in their continental homes, but that both the *Grettissaga* and *Beowulf* are to be traced ultimately to a common Scandinavian original.

Perhaps it will be clearest, at this point, to recapitulate the whole development, as I conceive it.

A widespread *märchen*, in a form determined by the mountainous country of the Scandinavian peninsula,¹ was attached, in Scandinavian territory,² to the hero Beowulf, and placed in a historical setting. In one incident of this story, the hero fought with a supernatural being in a cave under a waterfall. Brought to England, still in the form of lays, it was ultimately worked over, with other material,³ into the present epic. Meanwhile, however, various modifications had been made in the story in the course of oral transmission, so that the epic poet probably found himself confronted, not with a single consistent tale, but with one extant in variant versions. In any case, influences of different sorts would tend to blur the clear outline of the scene of this incident;—the unfamiliarity of the English with waterfalls of the sort here described, the conception of Grendel as of the brood of Cain, and therefore dwelling “in the desert,” and Beowulf’s connection with the sea as a killer of nickers. These confusions are reflected in the epic, in which the descriptions of the

¹ Cf. Brandl, Paul’s *Grundriss*, Vol. II, p. 995: “Ursprünglich in skandinavischer Berglandschaft gedacht, kam sie (the basic story) mit den Angelsachsen nach Brittanien,” etc. Panzer, p. 394: “Die Annahme, dass dieser Märchentypus im frühen Mittelalter im südlichen Skandinavien bekannt gewesen sei, unterliegt . . . keinen Bedenken.”

² Panzer, p. 394: “Noch auf skandinavischem Boden hat das Bärensohnmärchen sich zur Beowulfsage gewandelt.”

³ I say nothing here, of course, of the dragon-fight.

haunted pool are hopelessly inconsistent. The tale continued to live on in Scandinavia, both in its independent *märchen*-form, and as united with *Beowulf*. In a version pretty close to that taken to England and made the basis of the Anglo-Saxon epic, it was added to the exploits of Grettir Asmundarson, a historical personage of the eleventh century. The *Grettissaga*, which preserves much of the original form of the story, thus enables us to see more clearly what was the original setting of the second adventure in *Beowulf*. The Scandinavian tale was also attached to Orm Storolfsson, a hero of the thirteenth century, and localized in a region where a cave actually existing in a precipice above the water recalled the cave and the precipice in the fictitious narrative.

These conclusions, it will be observed, are in no wise revolutionary; they are entirely in line with the best modern research. Recent discussion of the relations between *Beowulf* and the *Grettissaga*, with the exception of Boer's wild hypotheses, which have been rejected by the most competent critics,¹ and which are indeed their own best refutation, has all tended to support in general Vigfússon's idea that "the old legend shot forth from its ancient Scandinavian home into two branches, one to England, where it was turned into an epic, and one to Iceland, where it was domesticated and embodied in a popular saga, tacked to the name of an outlaw and hero." Bugge held, with some modifications, much this view. It is perhaps more important to note the result of the two latest discussions

¹"Boer's Versuch, eine ältere Fassung aus der Überlieferung herauszuschälen und eine zweifache Interpolation zu erweisen, ist weder in der Überlieferung noch durch genügende sprachliche Beweise begründet, und muss deshalb zurückgewiesen werden." Mogk, *Paul's Grundriss*, Vol. II, p. 757.—"Boer's Erklärung erweist sich . . . als in allen Punkten vollständig verfehlt." Panzer, p. 401. See also Schück's unfavorable comments, pp. 20, 21.

of this question, by Schück and Panzer, than to examine Bugge's views in detail, which were not quite consistent or thoroughly worked out. Bugge's conclusion that "it is most unlikely that (the northern sagas which show resemblances to *Beowulf*) derive immediately from the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*-epic," is shared by both these critics. Schück notes that such a saga is not historical, in the beginning, but becomes attached in later times to historical persons and connected with historical events, and thinks that this particular narrative was given historical elements in Denmark, and thence was taken over to England, while it was meanwhile carried about the north as unhistoric material, and there connected with such people as Grettir and Orm. At the close of his discussion, Schück says, "All these reasons put together make it probable that the northern sagas do not derive from England, but that they are originally northern, and that the resemblances between them and *Beowulf* rest on the fact that all are derived from the same northern sources." Panzer's view is, as has already been said, similar to Bugge's, although he rightly observes that Bugge's view of the literary relationships of the different versions of the story was much too simple. "In the sagas of Grettir and Orm," says Panzer, "independent attachments of the Bear's-Son *märchen*, mingled with the Doughty-Hans motive, are to be assumed. Grettir and Orm are well-authenticated historical personages; the attachment of the *märchen* to them obviously was due to the fact that they were both distinguished for an unusual bodily strength. . . . The literary form of the stories of their exploits, preserved for Grettir mainly in prose, for Orm in prose and verse, exhibits many elements which are foreign to the story of *Beowulf*, but are to be found in the *märchen*. At the same time there are to be found in the *Grettissaga* and in the narratives about

Orm, a series of points which correspond strikingly to *Beowulf*; and since in each case these contain formal elements as well, they really presuppose literary influence. This influence might have been exerted in two ways: either the Scandinavian original of *Beowulf* or an English poem dealing with the same material as *Beowulf* and in part identical with it might have influenced (not necessarily directly) the Icelandic version; both alternatives are equally possible, in view of the relations between the two countries in general culture, and especially in literary matters." The preceding discussion, it will be seen, affords strong ground for accepting the former of these alternatives,—influence of the Scandinavian tale in literary and in *märchen*-form.¹

The precise details of the relationships between these stories must, in the nature of the case, remain obscure. We can, with approximate accuracy, discover by patient study the main lines of development, but the thousand subtle influences at work in shaping tales such as these cannot be laid bare by the most untiring research or by the keenest logic. More and more, as we gain in knowledge of the poem, we see how earlier investigators, even those of the greatest distinction, erred in supposing such analysis possible. Modern research has illustrated the complexity and the difficulty of even the simpler problems in the

¹ The fact that both *Beowulf* and Orm are represented as winning partly by the aid of God, while their adversaries are conceived as heathen, is no argument, as far as I can see, for the influence of an English tale. Panzer suggests rather doubtfully that it might be, since these Christian touches could not have been due to a common Scandinavian original, but might have come from England. But these are easily explained as independent developments; one does not have to look to seventh-century England for Christian elements in a Scandinavian saga of the fourteenth century, and, as Panzer himself recognizes, the Christian elements in *Beowulf* are relatively superficial.

evolution of the popular epic. It has preferred to confine itself more rigidly to fact, and to depend less upon imagination. Though it does not work out details with the satisfying minuteness of the preceding generation, it is surer of the broad lines to which these details must be subordinated.

If the preceding analysis be correct, we have reached results of considerable importance for the criticism of *Beowulf*. One of the finest passages in the poem, possibly the finest single piece of description in Anglo-Saxon verse, has been interpreted with greater fidelity to the text, and its significance for the rest of the epic defined. The original scene of the second adventure has been indicated, and the probable relation of this to other conceptions established. The events of the second adventure have become much more intelligible. Grendel and his mother now appear, in that version of the *märchen* underlying *Beowulf* and the *Grettissaga*, to have been waterfall-trolls; and only secondarily sea-demons or fen-demons. In order to penetrate to their abode, the hero was obliged to dive beneath the rushing water, and enter a cave behind the waterfall. The investigation has, furthermore, placed the relations between *Beowulf* and the *Grettissaga* in a much clearer light. The general theory of the Scandinavian origin of *Beowulf*, so tardily accepted by the scholarly world, has once more been confirmed. Indeed, acceptance of the foregoing arguments practically involves admission of such an origin. And once more the complexity in the whole development of the story is revealed. The epic rings with the voices of a multitude of story-tellers. Like the glittering hoards over which dragons watched, it displays treasures wrought by many hands, and ancient heirlooms, fashioned by men of old in lands far beyond the seas.

WILLIAM WITHERIE LAWRENCE.

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Lawrence, William Witherle, 1876-
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The haunted mere in Beowulf.
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